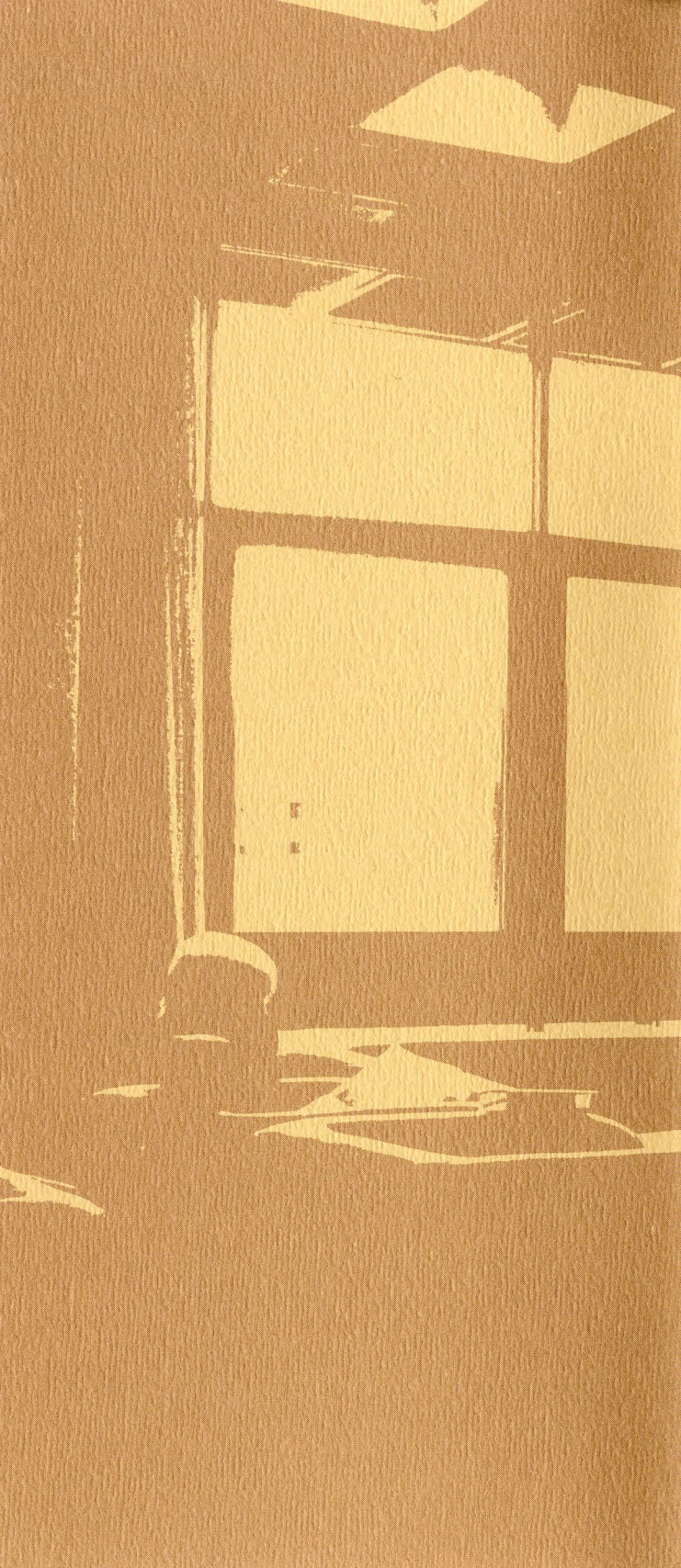


LIBRARY DEDICATION PROGRAM

University of Arizona

April 13, 1977





PROGRAM

GREETING AND INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

John P. Schaefer, President
University of Arizona

REMARKS

Rudy E. Campbell, Chairman
Arizona Board of Regents

INTRODUCTION OF GUEST OF HONOR

W. David Laird
University Librarian

DEDICATORY ADDRESS

Wallace E. Stegner

DEDICATORY BENEDICTION

Emory Sekaquaptewa

CELEBRATION

Bernard L. Fontana
Master of Ceremonies



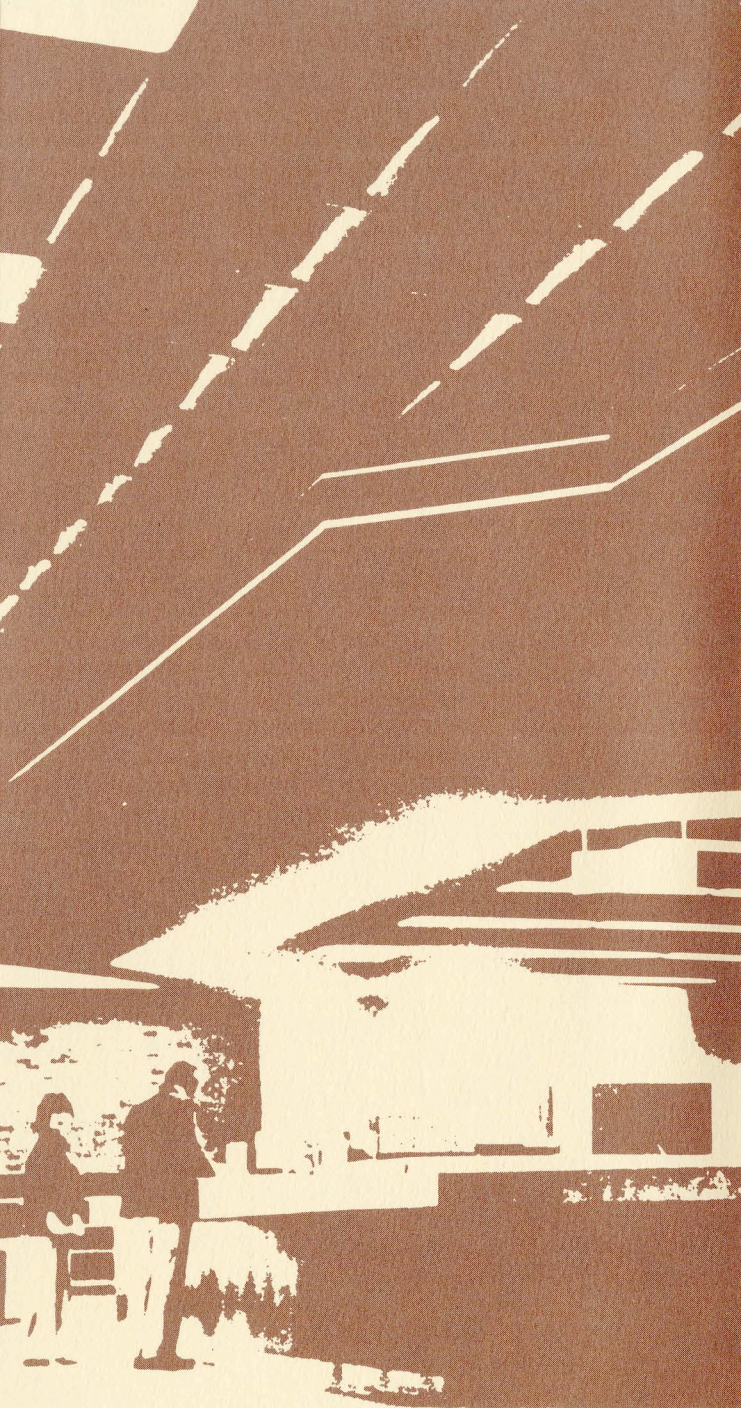


Figure 1

A DEDICATION

Wallace Stegner

Asked to help dedicate a great new library, one can easily be tempted into reassuring clichés. These are the occasions on which we are more or less expected to say the expected: to congratulate one another on the value of shared and cherished learning; to assert the durability of the highest human traditions in the face of ignorance, barbarism, and obscurantism; to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness. We tend to ignore the fact that only a small percentage of Americans cares at all about libraries or what they provide, and the fact that civilization seems to disintegrate at least as fast as it moves forward, and the further fact that culturally it seems our fate as Americans to go around in borrowed clothes or hardly any—that we are all a little like the immigrant who bragged: “When I first come to this country I didn’t have a rag to my back, and now, praise be to the Lord, I’m just covered with ‘em.”

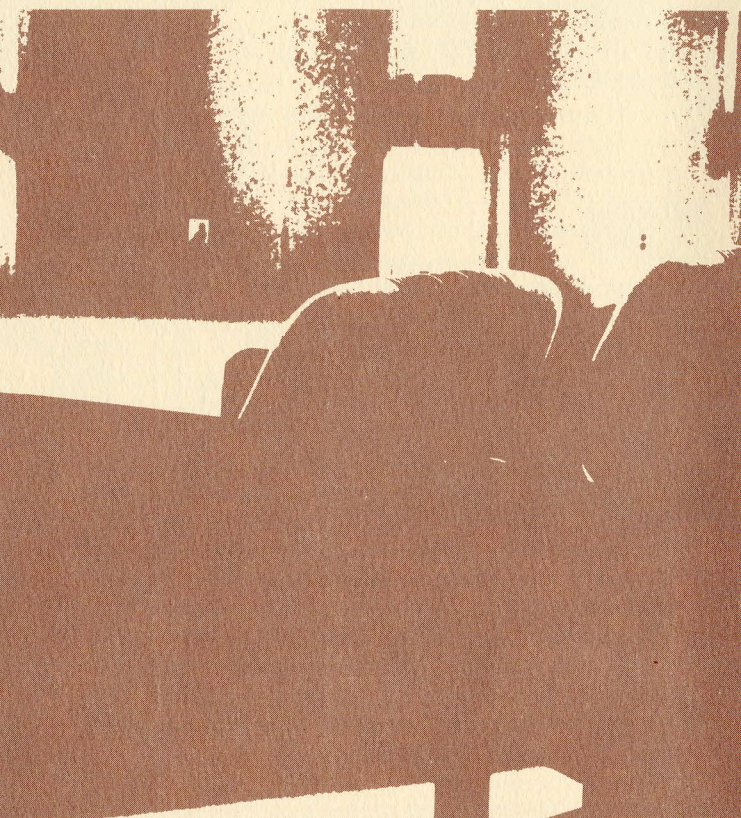
A few years ago, dedicating another library in another western university, I said something like the expected—that a library is “one of the noblest activities of any culture: measure of what has been, indication of what may be, testimonial to our purposes that are shared even in antagonism, reassurance that *homo sapiens* has been and will remain sapient.” I believe that as fully in 1977 as I did in 1968, as wholeheartedly in Arizona as in Utah. But today, with your indulgence, I would like to talk from another and somewhat more personal angle—in, if you please, another set of clichés.

There is no organized opposition to the construction of libraries, as there is to the building of shopping centers and reclamation dams. Nobody has enunciated a no-growth policy in this area. So far as I know, library builders don’t have to file environmental impact reports. Nevertheless, as the reluctant and minimum support of many public library systems indicates, there are those to whom such a library as this is a matter of the utmost indifference, and some who find the very idea of libraries objectionable.

The indifferent can hardly be galvanized. They include perhaps ninety percent of the population, the people who prefer dune buggies, skin flicks, and other forms of topless entertainment to books. Those who have philosophical objections to libraries belong to the ten percent who might be expected to be on God's side. They include the vitalists, literary or hedonistic or both, as well as a whole spectrum of the anti-historical, people who celebrate the present over the past and think they can tell one from the other.

The vitalists conceive libraries to be full of dust and mold. They perceive a great gulf between books and life. "Books are good enough in their own way," says Robert Louis Stevenson with some condescension, "but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life." Similarly, it is only after he has managed to be "done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms," that Walt Whitman can take to the open road. He appears to agree with Mr. Dooley, in whose opinion "Libries niver encouraged lithrachoor anny more than tombstones encourage livin.'"

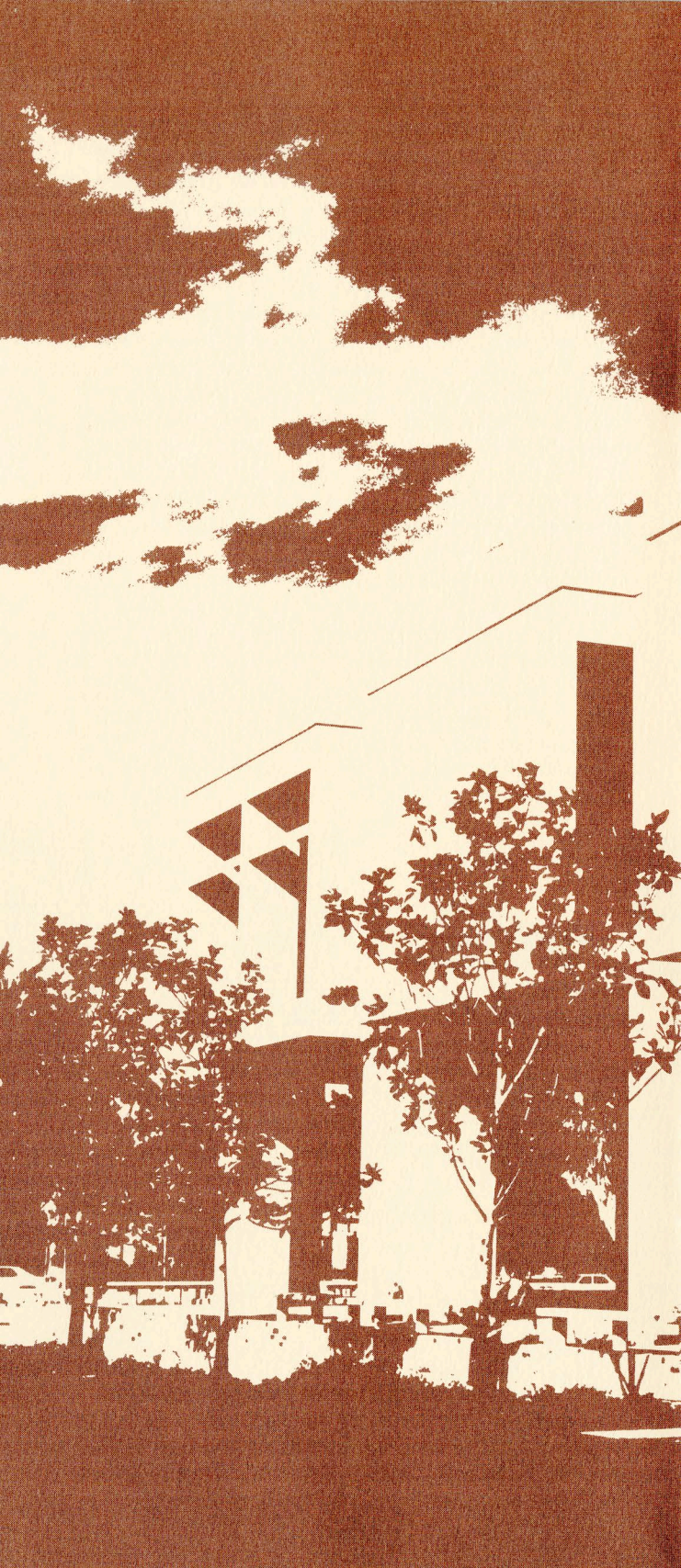
Fair enough. Now and then most of us share these sentiments. But the antipathy of the literary to books is unreal; it represents only our irritation at pedantry and bookful blockheads. As for the



theory that books are a bloodless substitute for life, sometimes the substitute is better than the real thing. When *Hustler* fell afoul of the censors in Cincinnati, its defense was that its explicit pictorial sex served a profound human need, and was indeed a bloodless substitute for rape and sodomy. Whether the University of Arizona Library will therefore feel it must subscribe to *Hustler* is a librarian's problem, not mine.

The idlers, loafers, and soul-inviteders that Stevenson and Whitman had in mind, as well as their contemporary hippie counterparts, are of course not bookhaters at all. They only pretend to be: they find it hard to be in favor of the traditional, and they resent the fact that libraries are housed indoors. But any expositor of Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance is likely to have a book or two in his saddlebags—as likely as not overdue at some library. Whatever they may say in the heat of argument, these people understand that there is no dichotomy between life and books. Life is *in* books; books are in life. Eric Hoffer, the longshoreman philosopher, spent his youth afoot and perhaps lighthearted on the open road, working in the crops up and down the West Coast. But he worked with a copy of Pascal's *Pensees* in his pocket, and when working time





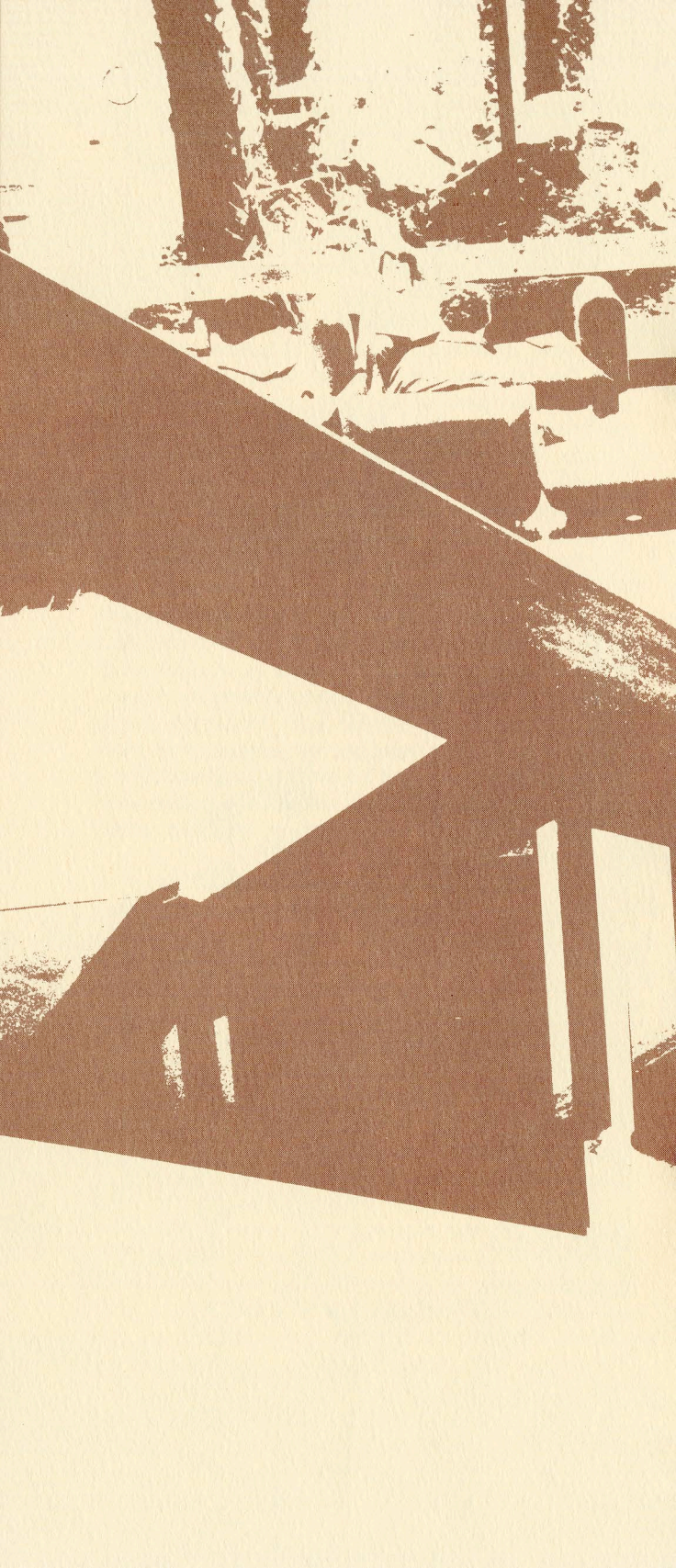
was over and winter ended the wandering, he kept warm physically and intellectually in the reading rooms of public libraries. Books and libraries have been at least as important in Eric Hoffer's life as paydays.

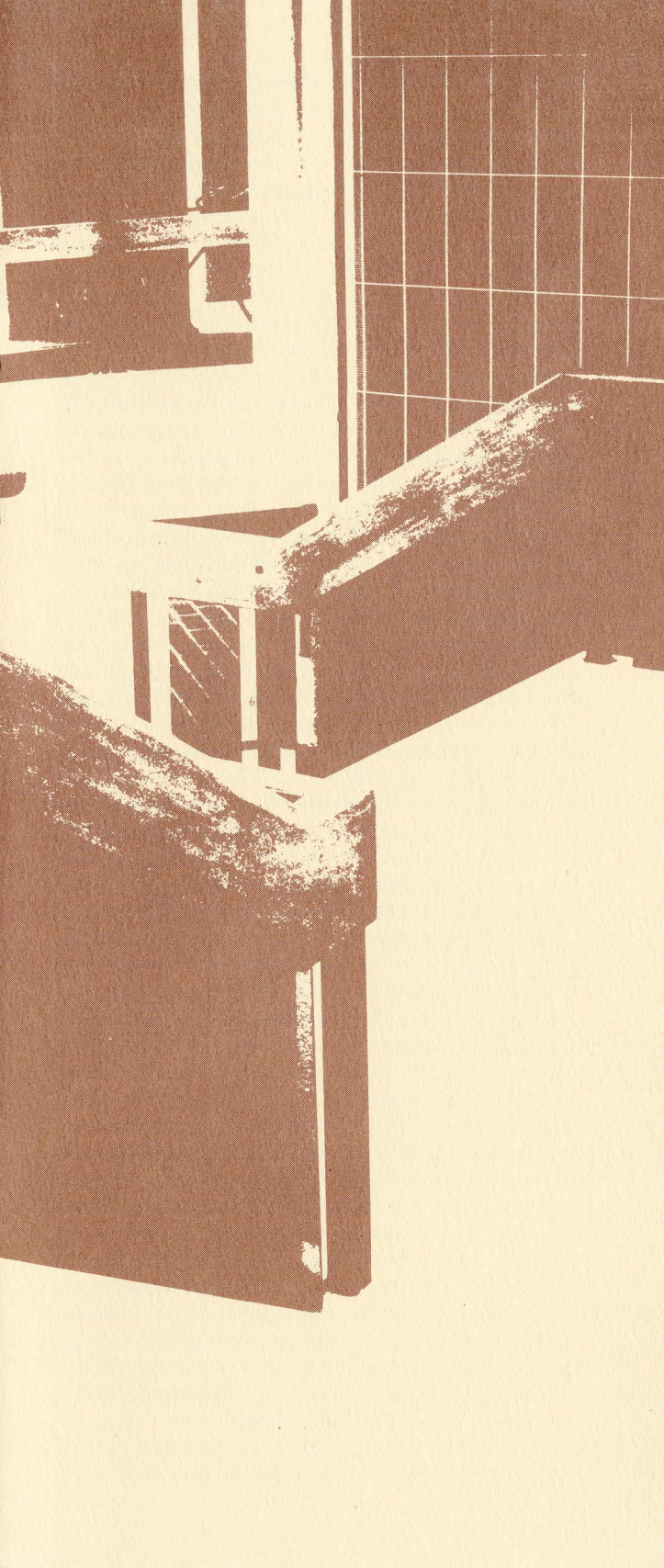
On the other hand, the anti-historical prejudice which half-consciously disparages libraries as boneyards of the past is deep-seated and of long duration. We are probably, except in the Bicentennial year, as a-historical a people as the world ever saw. Both the conditions of a new continent and the reasons why people came to it encouraged a disregard of the past, and an expanding technology based on science reinforced that tendency. We mistrust the traditional, retool frequently, go culturally stripped-down for greater mobility, equate change with progress and life, custom with stasis, effeteness, and death.

John Wesley Powell, the first explorer of the Grand Canyon, founder of some of the most useful scientific bureaus of the federal government, and prophetic student of the West, declared that most of the record of the past is argument in defense of error. He was a most American American, and in his way he was right. Librarians trying to keep up with a rapidly-changing science such as biology know what he was talking about, for half of what they collect as indispensable one year is disproved or outgrown or supplanted the next.

And it is not only as repositories of dead or useless or simply unwanted knowledge that libraries go counter to American prejudices. Being warehouses of history, they also contain and in some degree perpetuate past injustices. They preserve copies of *Huckleberry Finn*, which uses the word "nigger;" and copies of *Oliver Twist* and "The Merchant of Venice," which contain offensive portraits of Jews; and copies of *Clarissa Harlowe*, which not only records but takes for granted the degrading dependence of women. I know black activists who at least until *Roots* could hardly be brought to say a good word for history or the shelves that contain it. History is an enemy. Liberation lies forward, not back.

Those activists do not differ in their fundamental attitudes from the pilgrims who left Europe to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony, or the Mormons who fled the pukes and mobbers of Illinois to create their Zion in the valleys of the mountains. The most exhilarating aspect of America was its promise of escape from repression, from past mistakes and unexpiated crimes,





from old debts, from inherited slaveries and inferiorities. New Jerusalem, Jubilee, the Big Rock Candy Mountain, New Harmony, Brook Farm, the barefoot communes where longhaired saints grow organic vegetables, are all variants of the same dream, dreamed first in older countries and re-dreamed on successive frontiers of this one where it seemed to have a chance of coming true.

The New World encouraged the unloading of Europe, the symbolic act that D. H. Lawrence described as the killing of the father. But from the beginning, some have been unwilling to kill the father, and others have found that he will not die. Cultures live on, either as debased residues or as abject imitations; there is no way to be new that does not re-use most of the elements of the old. Hence the ambivalence that a thousand observers have remarked in American civilization: its brash assertiveness on the one hand, and on the other its shamefaced acknowledgment of European cultural superiority, its embarrassed admission that it is very short of cathedrals.

A good part of American intellectual history has involved the attempt to rationalize the fusion of cultivated and crude, to define the new, to answer the question that Crèvecoeur asked before the Revolution: "Who is this new man, the American?" The question has not had its full answer yet. The uneasiness that prompted it is perpetuated in our simultaneous impulse to establish and to mistrust libraries and museums.

I have been asking myself that question, in its personal form, "Who am I?" since I was in the first grade. At the age of five I was carried off to Saskatchewan with the rest of the family baggage, which was not extensive, and on the way I lost not only my teddy bear but my country and my identity. Canada in 1914 was involved in World War I, and Canadian kids kept demanding of little immigrants why the United States was too yellow to get in and help. Almost the only fist fights I ever had were in defense of my country—my *old* country, now bewilderingly lost. I didn't know whether I was American or Canadian, or what it meant to be either. For a while, because my mother was of Norwegian parentage, I tried to be a Norwegian, and signed my schoolbooks and my personal copy of *Tarzan of the Apes* with the family's old-country name. And when at the age of eleven I was taken out of Canada and back to Montana, and Montana kids snickered at my turtle-necked sweaters and my shoepac moccasins, then I was sick for home for my short-lived

Canadian identity, and half resentful of the one I was expected to resume.

We know ourselves not as idiosyncratic individuals but by our cultural heritage and affiliations—we do not exist without the language, history, political institutions, laws, customs, games, foods, and arts that shaped our growing up—and my heritage was broken and my affiliations uncertain. Things would have been even more confusing if I had had to adapt to another language, but still I was a sort of quintessential American, almost as abstract as an equation, culturally stripped for life in a primitive country. I was a good shot by the time I was ten, and had had a long course in the casual killing of creatures which is the saddest consequence of any frontier, but I had never been in—had never heard mention of—a museum or library, never seen a building more architecturally distinguished than a grain elevator, never been to a play or opera, knew no music more advanced than dirty folksongs and Sunday School hymns. I had never seen a picture more sophisticated than those on calendars or on the tin shields with which we used to close up the stovepipe holes when we dismantled the stoves in spring. Those chromos were mainly concerned with frontier confrontations: men in canoes coming around bends upon upreared grizzly bears.

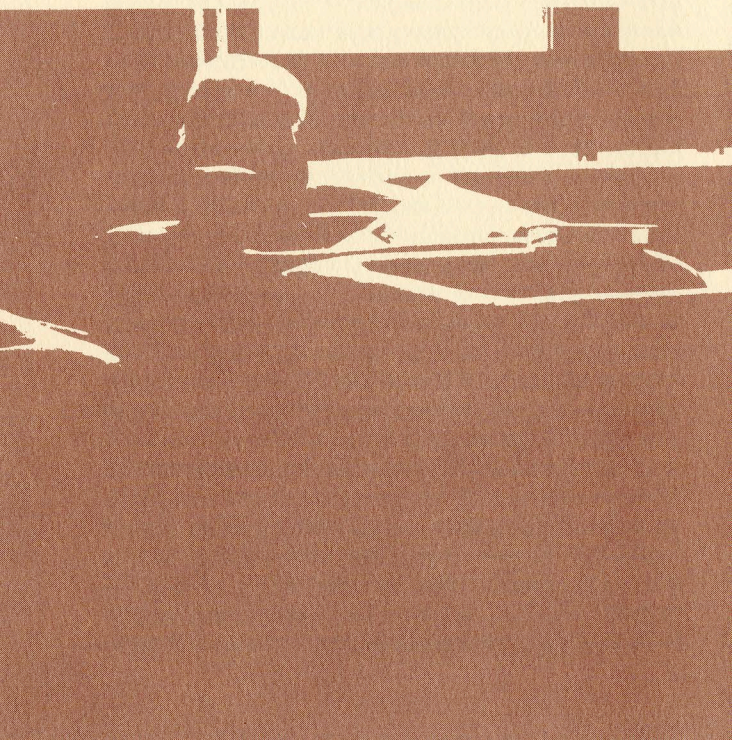
The town we lived in in winter was five years younger than I was. The prairie homestead where we spent our summers was a sea of grass utterly unmarked by the Blackfeet and Assiniboines who had hunted and fought across it. I grew up in a state of nature, without history and with no civilization except the rudimentary or residual folk culture of a belated frontier. My childhood companions were as raw and perhaps as confused as I was—cockney English, Canadians from Ontario, Scandinavians, Dukhobors, French-Indian half-breeds. Though we shared a limited experience—and it was a strong bond, I feel it yet for anyone who grew up in shortgrass country—we took the imprint of the new country each in his own way, because each of us brought a different mixture to our naturalization.

Once I spoke about this to the Association of Greek Writers in Athens, trying to explain America, which they conceived as some sort of monolith, some single definable thing. It was clear why they did so. In the poems of George Seferis, who had just won the Nobel Prize, as well as in Kazantzakis and other Greek writers, there is

a strong and universal consciousness of what it means to be Greek. History clangs like bronze in Seferis' poems; the felt knowledge of a continuous past and present informs every line. For twenty-six centuries backward, a Greek poet can hear a language that is recognizably his own all the way from Linear B. The monuments and ruins, the sculpture, the vases, the dramas and the philosophical explorations, are all his, as are the wars and the defeats. And back of the high civilization of the Great period is the cruder, mixed, warring chaos out of which it was made, the times during which men and gods came as Phrygians or Minoans or Egyptians or Dorians, and stayed to become Greeks.

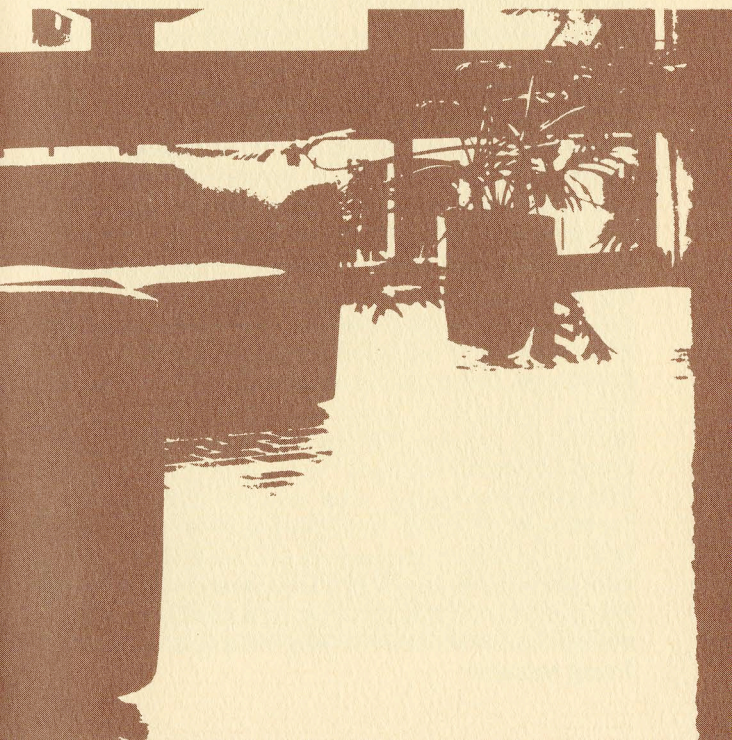
Those Greek writers must have been a little astonished to hear a man who had grown up without history come carrying culture back to Athens. Some of them said frankly that they envied me, for a glorious past can be a burden to a writer living in a diminished present. But I envied them more than they envied me, for what they had was what I had spent my life hopelessly trying to acquire.

We have been a melting pot, but the country is too big and various, and the time has been too short, for us to become one nation or one people or one kind. We are much closer to what the Canadians say they want—a mosaic, an anthology. I am a very different animal from Ernest



Gaines, a black man born in Cajun Louisiana, or Scott Momaday, a Kiowa Indian brought up in the Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, and an even more different animal from Alfred Kazin, a Jewish American born and reared in New York. You are not much reminded of Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* or Gaines's *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* when you read Kazin's *A Walker in the City*, and none of the three will remind you much of Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*. But any one of those books is as American as the other; all are attempts by American writers to uncover and know their inheritance and their identity.

Tocqueville and other early students of the American experiment feared the leveling effects of an egalitarian society. They were afraid that distinction would not be encouraged and difference not permitted, that the tyranny of the majority would bring us to mediocrity and sameness. It has turned out otherwise, in spite of Macdonald's Hamburgers and other leveling forces. Someone described us as variety within a consensus. Individuality asserts itself, geographic and ethnic variations persist, the regions go on creating related but markedly different civilizations. Though we may look much the same to outsiders, we thrive on our differences, and when the wind is southwesterly we can tell a hawk from a handsaw, a native Arizonan from a New Yorker or Bostonian or Georgian, a black American from a white one



and an Indian American from either. As for distinction, it can hardly be said to be suppressed when in 1976 this single nation sweeps the Nobel Prizes against the rest of the world.

We still may be not quite sure what an American is. We may never know. We are bound to go on trying to find out, and we make our discoveries within the narrower limitations of regional or ethnic sub-cultures. That is why I am always exhilarated by a regional advance such as this great new library, built to house an existing hoard of books and provide space for a new and greater hoard.

I am American enough to believe that, for all its imperfections and our constant struggle to expose and correct them, the American Dream is a good dream, and our system the best and freest in the world. I am regionalist enough to mistrust the opinions of the *New York Review of Books* almost as much as if they were expressed in a foreign publication, and to believe that if I am generally an American I am particularly a Westerner, and to be convinced that if Cartier and Cabot and Vespucci had cruised the West Coast instead of the east, the Sierra Club would now be mounting a campaign to preserve the New York and New England wilderness.

We share a cultural pilgrimage, but it is a different pilgrimage, and with different timing, for each region. It began for New England when the pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth Rock, and for Utah when Brigham Young's advance wagons emerged from the mouth of Emigration Canyon into the valley of Great Salt Lake, and for Arizona when Father Kino ventured into the Santa Cruz Valley to establish missions among the Pima and Sobaipuri Indians. For people of European or Asian or African backgrounds it invariably means giving up much of the old, discovering and adapting to the new, and eventually, perhaps after centuries, amalgamating old and new into something truly new and with the capacity for life and growth in it. For native Americans it has meant being inundated and overwhelmed, nearly destroyed, by the high-energy civilization and the superior numbers of the invaders; and out of that overwhelming, like people digging out from a mud-slide, a difficult re-emergence and re-establishment on top of what has overwhelmed them. In either case, cross-fertilization. The meeting of two cultures is a challenge that, even when one seems totally defeated, begets a living response.

A library such as this is the storehouse of that amalgamation and cross-fertilization and adaptation. It is both a monument and an instrument. It binds Arizona and the Southwest to world civilization, assures it a place in the history of mind, at the same time that it encourages the process of regional self-definition.

It is better, they say, to collect a library than to inherit one. In practice, those who love books cannot avoid doing both. This library looks both backward and forward, and in both directions all the lights are green.

POSTSCRIPT

The following letter accompanied Dr. Stegner's text. We felt its strong sentiment should be shared with all readers who support and believe in libraries and history and mankind

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

CREATIVE WRITING CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

March 6, 1977

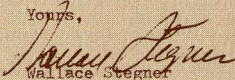
W. David Laird
University Librarian
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

Dear Mr. Laird:

Here's some sort of manuscript of some sort of speech. I guess I will deliver it on April 13. I guess it's safe to print it, as you have indicated you want to, in a pamphlet. But I'm curious to know what might happen if I changed my mind at the last minute, threw this away, and came on with some sort of denunciation of the book-haters, from the academic critics through the non-book-makers to the barbarians.

I don't suppose I will. So unless you have strong objections, let this be the speech. I somehow wish it had more hair on it, and more teeth in it, but I remember Lear: "How sharper than a serpent's thanks it is to have a toothless child."

Yours,


Wallace Stegner

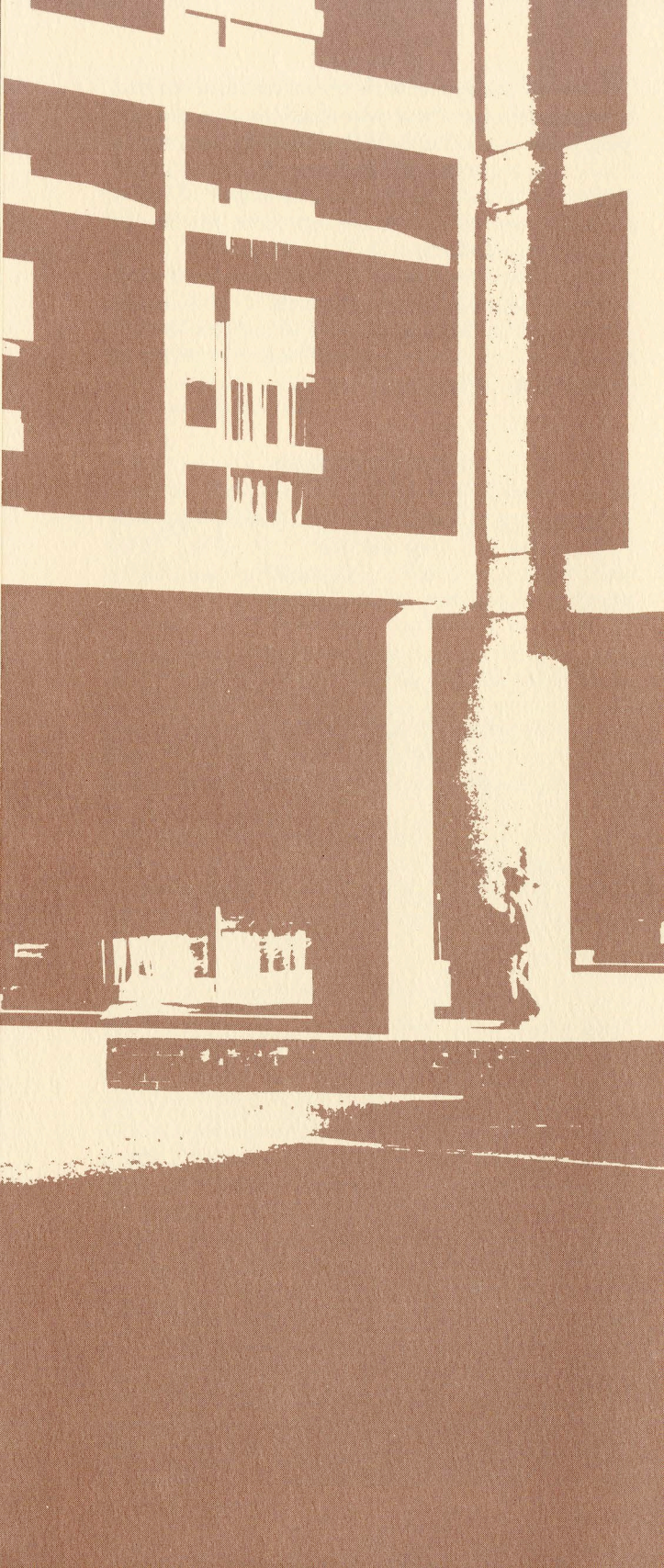


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Benjamin Ide Wheeler, 1899

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